

When We Were (almost) Chinese: Identity and the Internment of Missionary Nurses in China, 1941–1945

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Between 1923 and 1939, six China-born children of United Church of Canada North China missionaries returned to China as missionary nurses during one of the most inauspicious periods for China missions. Not only was the missionary enterprise under critical scrutiny, but China was also on the verge of war. Three of the nurses were interned by the Japanese in 1941. This study focuses on the pivotal decisions these nurses made to return to China and then to remain there after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, tracing the influences on those decisions back to their missionary childhoods in Henan.

De 1923 à 1939, six enfants nés en Chine de missionnaires que l'Église Unie du Canada avait envoyées en Chine du Nord sont retournées en Chine en tant qu'infirmières missionnaires durant l'une des périodes les plus inhospitalières pour des missions en Chine. Non seulement scrutait-on l'action missionnaire à la loupe, mais la guerre était sur le point d'éclater en Chine. Trois des infirmières ont été internées par les Japonais en 1941. Cette étude met l'accent sur la décision déterminante que ces infirmières ont prise de retourner en Chine puis d'y rester après l'éclatement de la guerre sino-japonaise en 1937, retraçant les motifs de cette décision jusqu'à leur enfance missionnaire à Henan.

AT 9:30 A.M. on Monday morning, December 8, 1941, Canadian missionary nurse Betty Thomson Gale walked through the Shandong Christian University ("Qilu") campus gates into four years of internment under the Japanese in China. She was returning home from the Qilu (Cheeloo) University Medical School and Hospital, where she had been

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supervising registration exams for her nursing students. Her house, like the homes of all missionaries on staff at Qilu, was located a few blocks from the hospital, within the walls of the large, tree-lined campus. Betty was heading home to nurse her infant daughter, Margaret, before returning to work. Her British husband Dr. Godfrey Gale was at the medical school, presenting a lecture to his students on spinal cords, membranes, and nerves. As Betty drew close to the campus, a “lorry unloading dozens of [Japanese] soldiers — all armed to the teeth”¹ appeared between her and the campus gates. Betty paused, “a moment of wild panic” overcoming her as she realized, “Margie is inside the gate.”

Frantically I rush across the road and “join the [Japanese] Army” [entering through the campus gates] — and the gates clang shut behind us. In the general excitement and confusion, no one notices me — and when the army turns left — by command I disobey the order and march right, and keep on going — running like mad — to get home to our baby... I snatch her to me and hold her fast while my heart thumps and my mind races.²

The much-anticipated war had finally come to the Gale family at Qilu and, with it, nine months of house arrest followed by three years of imprisonment in civilian internment camps created for “enemy aliens” — that is, citizens of Allied nations at war against Japan.

Betty Gale was one of six China-born children of United Church of Canada North China missionaries (“mish-kids”) to return to China as missionary nurses after taking nurse’s training in Canada. This second generation of missionary nurses arrived in China during the 1920s and 1930s, at a time when China missions had lost much of their earlier lustre. The missionary enterprise in China was under very critical scrutiny in both Canada and China as members of both countries questioned its ties with imperialism. Furthermore, fewer barriers to professional careers for women meant that missionary work was no longer the most attractive avenue open to educated religious women. Finally, China had entered one of its most traumatic periods — one that culminated in an eight-year war against Japan.

It is remarkable that these six mish-kid nurses chose to take up the missionary calling at such an inopportune time. In the tumultuous months leading up to Pearl Harbor in 1941, all six were still living in China, against consular advice. While three eventually evacuated, three — including Betty Gale — were imprisoned in Japanese internment camps until 1945. This study focuses on the pivotal decisions these six mish-kid

1 Margaret Wightman private collection, Betty Gale, “The Journal of Betty Gale: A Personal Account of Four Years of Civilian Internment in Occupied China, July 1941 – September 1945” (unpublished diary), p. 15.

2 *Ibid.*

nurses made to return to China as missionaries and then to remain there after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, tracing the influences on those decisions back to their missionary childhoods in Henan (Honan). Placing identity at the centre of analysis, this study explores the inter-relatedness of the six mish-kid nurses between 1923 and 1941 and examines how their childhood contributed to their self-identities as almost Chinese and almost Canadian, but fully missionaries.

Placing Identity at the Centre

Canada occupied a special place within the phalanx of China missions.³ In 1919 more than one-quarter of British missionaries were, in fact, Canadian. In proportion to their size and resources, the churches of Canada sponsored more missionaries at home and abroad than any other nation in Christendom.⁴ According to Alvyn Austin and Jamie Scott, Christian missions have had a relatively strong impact on Canadian identity — greater, for example, than on American identity.⁵ Perhaps nowhere is the link between China missions and the development of Canadian identity more evident than in the lives of China-born missionary kids. The bilingual and bi-cultural United Church of Canada missionary children reared in Henan province had a particular view of the world and a unique understanding of their place in it. The over-representation of mish-kids in missionary nursing between 1923 and 1941 demonstrates how nursing was understood as not only congruent with missionary ideals, but an embodiment of them. The collective identity of the nine missionary nurses who started their careers at the North China Mission in the 1920s and 1930s was shaped in large part by the childhood experiences of six girls who came of age at that same place, the North China Mission in Henan province.

What did it mean to be a Canadian mish-kid in China? This question has emerged out of two larger studies on Canadian missionary nurses in China. In the first, a comprehensive overview of nursing at the North China Mission between 1888 and 1947, I discovered that five of the nine missionary nurses hired by the Woman's Missionary Society between 1920 and 1939 were North China mish-kids. Although an in-depth exploration of mish-kids was beyond the scope of that study, the question of mish-kids emerged again in my current study of Betty Gale and the internment of Canadian missionary nurses in China, when I discovered that three of the four Canadian missionary nurses to be interned under the Japanese

3 Alvyn Austin, *Saving China: Canadian Missionaries in the Middle Kingdom, 1888–1959* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 85.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Alvyn Austin and Jamie Scott, *Canadian Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples: Representing Religion at Home and Abroad* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 4.

for the duration of the war (1941 to 1945) were North China mish-kids. It became apparent that an examination of the phenomenon of mish-kids would be central to an understanding of both Canadian missionary nurse internment and Canadian missionary nursing in China. Answering the question of what it meant to be a mish-kid ultimately addresses the broader question: what did it mean to be a Canadian missionary nurse in republican China?

In China, missionary nursing was not confined within the walls of mission hospitals, nor did it operate only within boundaries of paid employment. As nurse historian Patricia D'Antonio has noted, women's culture and experiences can never be completely understood just in their relationship with paid labour; understanding women's places within the social fabric of their communities, neighbourhoods, and families is key to understanding their consciousness, role, and agency.⁶ Placing identity at the centre of analysis allows an exploration of how the mish-kids' private experiences shaped their public choices. It invites reflection on how mish-kids' self-identity was influenced by the well-established social identity of North China missionaries as devout and highly educated risk-takers. It also helps to explain why second-generation missionary nursing was not an independent career so much as an extension of the family business: becoming a trained nurse was one of the few ways that mish-kids could reunite with their missionary parents and return to their childhood home.

The two main sources used here were memoirs, published and unpublished, and oral interviews: mish-kids' recollections of past events. These reminiscences were supplemented with letters, mission documents, and photographs from private family collections, the United Church of Canada Archives, and Library and Archives Canada. Additional insights were gleaned through innumerable informal conversations with surviving mish-kids, including those who accompanied me to China on research visits to Anyang (Changte), Weihui (Weihwei), Jinan (Tsinan), and Shanghai/Pudong (Pootung). Since all of the six mish-kid nurses in this study are deceased, the mish-kids I met are China-born siblings, children, and childhood friends of the missionary nurses. While the study draws on formalized records and recordings, these informal conversations and related insights have inevitably influenced my interpretation of the material, whether consciously or not.

When focusing on memory work, historians must be sensitive to the ways in which the process of narrating lives may itself serve to write a

6 Patricia D'Antonio, "Revisiting and Rethinking the Rewriting of Nursing History," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 73 (1999), pp. 268–290, and "Nurses — and Wives and Mothers: Women and the Latter-day Saints Training School's Class of 1919," *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 19, no. 3 (2007), pp. 112–136.

particular identity into being. Because reminiscences reflect the subjectivity of the narrator — in this case, mish-kids — these sources are sometimes dismissed as unreliable because they are viewed to be coloured by egocentrism, hyperbole, and selective memory.⁷ M. Louise Fitzpatrick suggests that recollections are best suited to fill gaps left by existing documentation rather than as principal sources.⁸ Alice Wexler is less sceptical, suggesting that recollections are valuable as long as the researcher is clear about the distinction between the memory of a life and the life actually lived.⁹ Wexler argues that the real value of recollections lies in how they represent a person's construction of self and give insight into the ongoing tension among people's gendered, racial, economic, and cultural selves — that is, their multiple identities. Geertje Boschma and others agree, adding that oral history also serves to create history of ordinary people's lives, countering the hegemonic record documented by those in power.¹⁰

In the study of missionary nursing, memory sources are of particular importance. Although much has been done over the past 20 years to restore “to their rightful place” Victorian women missionaries “who have been ignored, misunderstood or forgotten,”¹¹ the historical record on second-generation missionary women remains scant.¹² Not only are unmarried missionary nurses often “rendered invisible” within the rubric of missionary medicine,¹³ but the nurses in this study are subsumed into the historical records of their missionary husbands after marriage. While the omission of nurses in medical histories has been attributed to

7 M. Louise Fitzpatrick, “Historical Research: The Method” in Patricia Munhall and Carolyn Oiler Boyd, eds., *Nursing Research: A Qualitative Perspective*, 2nd ed. (New York: National League for Nursing Press, 1993), pp. 364–370.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Alice Wexler, “Emma Goldman and the Anxiety of Biography” in Sara Alpern, Joyce Antler, Elisabeth Israels Perry, and Ingrid Winther Scobie, eds., *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 34–50.

10 Geertje Boschma, Margaret Scaia, Nerrisa Bonifacio, and Erica Roberts, “Oral History Research” in Sandra B. Lewenson and Eleanor Krohn Hermann, eds., *Capturing Nursing History: A Guide to Historical Methods in Research* (New York: Springer, 2008), pp. 79–98.

11 Jaquelyn Dowd Hall, “Second Thoughts: On Writing Feminist Biography,” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1987), p. 23.

12 For studies on first-generation missionary women, see Ruth Compton Brouwer, *New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), and *Modern Women, Modernizing Men: The Changing Missions of Three Professional Women in Asia and Africa, 1902–1969* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002); Rosemary Gagan, *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881–1925* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); Rhonda Semple, *Missionary Women: Gender, Professionalism and the Victorian Idea of Christian Mission* (Rochester, NY: Boydell, 2003).

13 Christoffer Grundman, *Sent to Heal! Emergence and Development of Medical Missions* (Landham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), p. 154.

gender biases that privilege the voice of (male) physicians over (female) nurses,¹⁴ one cannot get away from the fact that there are, as Christoffer Grundman has noted, simply a lack of “documents and biographies” related to missionary nursing.¹⁵ Memoirs and oral recollections, then, serve as more than gap-fillers to the mission record; in many cases they are the record. By focusing on narrative accounts, this study provides a descriptive context of China-as-observed as well as individual and collective interpretations of China-as-lived.

In relying on recollections as the predominant source, it is important to acknowledge, as oral historian Sally Chandler has noted, that “subjectivity — both our subject’s and our own — shapes the content and interpretation of our work.”¹⁶ Just as historians must be sensitive to the ways in which subjects bring their particular values and beliefs to their writing, so must researchers be sensitive to how our own location and perspective might influence our work. To Boschma, interpretation of sources, be they written records or evidence generated by oral interviews, always reflects the subjective position of the researcher.¹⁷ Pamela Sugiman’s study of interned Japanese Canadians in Canada illustrates this well. As a third-generation Japanese Canadian of working-class parents who were both interned in British Columbia after the attacks on Pearl Harbor, Sugiman was conscious of the importance of self-reflexivity in the research process. Situating herself as a co-constructor of the narratives that emerged through her oral interviews, Sugiman acknowledged the need to consider her own motivations and needs alongside those of her subjects.¹⁸

I am not sure that I would have been invited into the lives of China mish-kids and their families had I not shared some of the characteristics of the mish-kid nurses who are at the centre of this study — that is, as a Christian Canadian nurse who has worked in mission settings. The relationships came slowly over the course of six years as I met missionary relatives and they began to introduce me to each other. Eventually, these relationships resulted in two research trips to China involving 12 relatives of Canadian missionaries, four of whom were mish-kids returning for the first time in 60 years. We shared stories during our travels across China, while gazing over the Great Wall, Shanghai Bund, the Yellow River,

14 Janet C. Ross Kerr, “Nursing History at the Graduate Level: State of the Art,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1994), p. 230.

15 Grundman, *Sent to Heal!*, p. 154.

16 Sally Chandler, cited in Geertje Boschma, Sonya Grypma, and Florence Melchior, “Reflections on Researcher Subjectivity and Identity in Nursing History” in Lewenson and Hermann, eds., *Capturing Nursing History*, pp. 99–122.

17 *Ibid.*

18 Pamela Sugiman, “Life is Sweet: Vulnerability and Composure in the Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadians,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2009), pp. 186–218.

Qilu university campus, the Weixian (Weihsien) internment camp memorial, and the former Weihui mission hospital. While some missionary family members communicated with me by e-mail, letter, or telephone, others sent me published and unpublished memoirs, letters, and photographs. Combined with data collected from archives, each of these contributed to my developing understanding of the mish-kid nurse story.

Sugiman describes oral interviews as conversational narratives benefiting both the interviewer and the interviewee. Ultimately the oral historian must respect what the narrator says and, I would add, what the narrator writes. To Sugiman, memory work is less about conveying empirical data than it is about constructing a moral message. Assuming, then, that the self-selected stories captured in the memoirs, interviews, and conversations by and with China mish-kids each “contain a message that the narrator wishes to communicate to a wider audience,”¹⁹ part of my aim is to decipher and explicate that message and the underlying social values that stimulated the creation of these stories. The pivotal decision by six Canadian missionary nurses to return to China and remain after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war is linked to their acculturation as children of missionaries belonging to the United Church of Canada North China Mission. Their identity as almost Chinese and almost Canadian (but fully neither) contributed to their common decision to return to and remain in China for as long as possible — with devastating results for some.

“We have Chinese Blood”: Mish-kid Nurses and the Sino-Japanese War

Between 1923 and 1939, six daughters of Canadian missionaries belonging to the United (originally Presbyterian) Church of Canada North China Mission took nurse’s training at the Toronto General Hospital and returned to China to join their parents as missionaries in their own right. In early 1941, all six still lived in China, but only one remained in active service with the NCM. The others had resigned to marry China missionaries from British and American mission boards, at least three of whom were also mish-kids. They lived in six separate cities — Jinan, Xian (Sian), Tianjin (Tientsin), Chuwang, Beijing, and Chengdu (Chengtu). By mid-1941 Mrs. Florence Mackenzie Liddell, Miss Dorothy Boyd, and Mrs. Jean Menzies Stockley had evacuated. The remaining three, Mrs. Betty Thomson Gale, Mrs. Mary Boyd Stanley, and Mrs. Georgina Menzies Lewis, were arrested and placed in separate Japanese internment camps from December 1941 until August 1945. (See Table 1.)

Although they lived in separate cities and worked under the auspices of separate mission boards after they married, these mish-kid nurses followed a remarkably similar career trajectory that led them to a pivotal decision to

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

TABLE 1: List of Canadian Missionary Nurses in Japanese-occupied China

Name	Birthplace	NCM parents	Nurse's training school	Grad date	Dates in China as RN	Married to China missionary	Mission	Intern years	Camp
Jean (Menzies) Stockley	Anyang, 1898	James R. & Davina Menzies	Toronto General Hospital (TGH)	1922	1923–1945	Dr. Handley Stockley, 1927	North China Mission (NCM); English Baptist Mission NCM; Baptist Missionary Society	–	–
Georgina (Menzies) Lewis	Huaiqing, 1906	James R. & Davina Menzies	TGH	1929	1931–1945	Dr. John Llewellyn Lewis, 1939	NCM; Baptist Missionary Society	1941–1945	Ash
Elizabeth (Thomson) Gale	Anyang, 1911	Andrew & Margaret Thomson	TGH & U of Toronto	1935; 1938	1939–1945	Dr. Godfrey Gale, 1940	NCM; London Missionary Society (LMS)	1941–1945	Yangzhou B; Pudong
Florence (MacKenzie) Liddell	Tianjin? 1912	Hugh & Agnes MacKenzie	TGH	1933?	1934–1941	Eric Liddell, 1934	NCM; LMS	Eric: 1941–1945	Eric: Weixian (d. Feb. 21, 1945)
Dorothy Boyd	Huaiqing, 1913	H. A. & J Boyd	TGH	1938	1939–1941	–	NCM	–	–

Continued

TABLE 1: *Continued*

Name	Birthplace	NCM parents	Nurse's training school	Grad date	Dates in China as RN	Married to China missionary	Mission	Intern years	Camp
Mary (Boyd) Stanley	Huaiqing, 1916	H. A. & J. Boyd	TGH	1938?	1939–1945	Charles Stanley, 1940	NCM (College of Chinese Studies)	1941–1945	Weixian
Hilda McIlroy*	?	–	?	?	?	–	Church Missionary Society	1941–1945	Yangzhou A & B; Pudong Weixian
Susie Kelsey*	?	–	Winnipeg General Hospital	1924?	1924–1949	–	Church of England (Anglican)	1941–1943	

* Not a North China mish-kid. Miss McIlroy is the only person listed as a “Canadian Missionary Nurse” in comprehensive internment camp records. For complete Nominal Rolls (14,400 internees), see Gregory Leck, *Captives of Empire: The Japanese Internment of Allied Civilians in China, 1941–1945* (Bangor, PA: Shandy Press, 2006).

live, work, and start families in China despite wartime conditions and a final decision to stay or evacuate in 1941. Their choices reflect a remarkable sense of agency; their ability to exercise choices allowed these women considerable control over their destinies. This agency, I propose, was tied to their identity as North China mish-kids. Although Canadian by nationality, these women did not feel bound to follow Canadian social trends or even consular advice. Instead, they based their decisions on their perceptions of the needs of the Chinese population, their sense of what a missionary role should be, and their domestic obligations to immediate family members.

Of the 30 Canadian missionary nurses who served at the North China Mission between 1888 and 1947, the six who were mish-kids had the strongest ties. They were bound by similar world views, difficult circumstances, and a genuine need for each other. Mish-kid nurses shared formative years at the North China Mission, which bred in them a unique bicultural, bilingual understanding of the world. They also shared formative nursing years at the Toronto General Hospital Training School for Nurses. Their lives, as the following discussion will demonstrate, were inextricably linked.

The First Mish-kid Nurse

In China, the May Fourth Movement in 1919 triggered a surge in Chinese nationalism and anti-imperialism that gained momentum through the 1920s. The ongoing protection of missionary interests through extraterritoriality rights reinforced in the minds of many Chinese the association between missions and imperialism.²⁰ The missionary conference of 1922 inadvertently sparked the creation of a Student Anti-Christian Association, which grew more revolutionary each year.²¹ In Canada and the United States, many were questioning the value of the missionary movement, reflected in part by diminishing financial support for missionaries. It was into this context that the first mish-kid nurse returned to China.

The phenomenon of mish-kid nursing can be best traced back to 1920, the year eminent missionary Dr. James R. Menzies was shot and killed at the North China Mission compound at Huaqing (Hwaiking) while coming to the rescue of two missionary women whose home was being invaded by a band of robbers.²² His wife, Mrs. Davina R. Robb Menzies, was living temporarily in Toronto with her three daughters when the telegram

20 Ka-che Kip, "China and Christianity: Perspectives on Missions, Nationalism, and the State in the Republican Period, 1912–1949" in Brian Stanley, ed., *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 132–143.

21 Alvyn Austin, "Wallace of West China" in Austin and Scott, eds., *Canadian Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples*, pp. 111–133.

22 Sonya Grypma, *Healing Henan: Canadian Nurses at the North China Mission, 1888–1947* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008). See also Sonya Grypma, "James

arrived on March 26, 1920 bearing the tragic news. Twenty-two-year-old Jean Menzies, the oldest daughter, had just started nurse's training at the Toronto General Hospital nursing school. Fourteen-year-old Georgina Menzies was in secondary school. Although we do not know why Jean Menzies made the remarkable decision to return to Huaiqing to work at the newly named Menzies Memorial Hospital where her father had laboured for 30 years, we do know that her decision was received with unmitigated delight by the missionary community in China and Canada. Through Jean Menzies and her fellow mish-kid Dr. Bob McClure — who agreed to return to take Dr. Menzies's place — her beloved father's work would live on.

When Jean Menzies arrived at the North China Mission in 1923 with her mother and sisters, the five girls who would later follow in her footsteps would have been well aware of the excitement caused by her arrival. At the time, Jean's sister Georgina was seventeen, Florence Mackenzie and Betty Thomson were twelve, and Mary and Dorothy Boyd were ten and seven years old respectively. Having borne witness to the outpouring of grief at the "martyrdom" of Dr. James Menzies, these young girls were doubtlessly caught up in the enthusiastic reception of the return of the first "one of our own" as a missionary. To North China missionaries who felt devastated by the traumatic loss of Dr. Menzies, the return of his daughter was reassuring: who better to take up the legacy of missionary work than the children of the missionaries themselves? If Jean Menzies was willing to return to the very hospital where her father had worked, to be supervised by the very woman her father had died while trying to rescue, and to work alongside the physician who took her father's place, then any missionary child could do it.

Jean Menzies's return — even more than the return of Bob McClure — reinforced the notion that the value of missionary work was proportionate to the level of self-sacrifice involved. As a trained nurse, Jean Menzies had no lack of career opportunity in Toronto; nor was the city considered an unsafe place for a young woman to work. Committing to work at the scene of her father's tragedy meant that Jean Menzies was willing to place herself at risk, just as he had. James Menzies had sacrificed his life; Jean was prepared to do the same. To the five young girls watching from the sidelines in 1923, two messages were clear: first, missionary work by its very nature involved risk and self-sacrifice; and second, the North China Mission community would always embrace its own.

The year 1923 was a critical one in the history of the mission, particularly in terms of the development of modern medical and nursing services.

Since first coming to Henan in 1888, North China missionaries lagged behind their American, British, and Canadian counterparts in other parts of China regarding the development of hospitals and, more importantly, Chinese nursing education. Medical missionaries had, at various times, petitioned the North China missionary leaders to improve and modernize medical work by, for example, building better hospitals and incorporating round-the-clock nursing care.²³ Without a shift in priorities and resources from evangelism to medical care, the death of Dr. Menzies in 1920 might well have spelled the end of medical and nursing services in Henan. However, the arrival of Jean Menzies and Bob McClure ushered in a vital new generation of medical missionaries who had the inherent respect of the older generation of conservative, evangelical missionaries and of newer missionaries with both the desire and passion to see medical services developed in Henan. Furthermore, Menzies and McClure were bred-in-the-bone Chinese: they spoke the language and intrinsically understood Chinese culture in a way that neither the older nor the newer generation of Canadian missionaries ever would.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Jean Menzies did not last long at Huaqing. Historical sources are silent on her decision to transfer to the mission hospital at nearby Weihui, but it seems reasonable to presume that the emotional toll of working in a place still filled with her father's presence was too much to bear. Nor is there evidence on how the missionary community responded to her decision to leave Huaqing. When Jean later decided to marry Dr. Handley Stockley of the English Baptist Mission, she unwittingly set two other standards for younger mish-kids to follow: marry a China missionary and establish roots in China, both in the midst of a violent national crisis. The couple had planned to be married in 1926, but Handley Stockley was "shut up for eight months in the siege of Xian."²⁴ Two months after their January 1927 marriage, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist army seized Nanjing (Nanking) with the aim of establishing a new central government there. The resultant bloodshed and violence triggered orders for missionary evacuation. All 96 North China missionaries evacuated Henan. Over 200 missionaries evacuated the West China mission at Sichuan (Szechwan). Interestingly, five Canadians refused to leave Sichuan, defying consular orders even after receiving a telegram stating "Whatinthehellisdelayingyoufivemen?"²⁵ They were later honoured as "gold star missionaries" who exemplified the fine line between disobedience and heroism in crisis situations.

23 For a fuller discussion of this period, see Grypma, *Healing Henan*.

24 United Church of Canada Archives [hereafter UCCA], Margaret Brown, "History of the Honan (North China) Mission of the United Church of Canada, Originally a Mission of the Presbyterian Church in Canada," n.d., 73:15.

25 Austin, *Saving China*, p. 208.

Refusing to evacuate could be considered either foolhardy or a sign of one's depth of commitment to the cause.

The year 1927 would be recorded in missionary annals as The Great 1927 Exodus: of 8,300 Protestant missionaries to be evacuated, 3,000 never returned. The Canadians who stayed in China bided their time in Tianjin while the crisis played out. In Tianjin, 15-year-old Florence Mackenzie first met London Missionary Society missionary Eric Liddell. Eric was also a mish-kid, born in Tianjin in 1902. He had gained notoriety in Scotland as an Olympic gold medalist before returning to China. Florence and Eric became engaged in 1930, shortly before Florence's departure for Toronto for nurse's training. Although her parents approved of the match, Hugh Mackenzie presciently believed that all women should have some kind of training before marriage — just in case something happened to their husbands.²⁶ Florence was in the third year of her nursing training when her best friend and fellow mish-kid Betty Thomson started into the first year of the same programme. Florence returned to China to marry the 31-year-old Eric Liddell after her graduation in 1933. Their decision to live in China ended in tragedy: Eric Liddell died at the Weixian Internment Camp in 1945.

Nursing and the Sino-Japanese War

Jean Menzies's younger sister Georgina was the third mish-kid to return to China as a missionary nurse. Returning to the North China Mission after graduating from the Toronto General Hospital nursing school in 1931, Georgina nursed at Anyang and Weihui for eight years. Georgina was working at Anyang on July 7, 1937, when war broke out between China and Japan. That same week the Weihui mission compound was flooded by the swollen Yellow River. As Japanese armies advanced towards Weihui, refugees started pouring into Henan from the north. In October 1937 Anyang was heavily bombed, and virtually all of the single missionary women were evacuated to Weihui. As physicians and nurses took care of the wounded, 3,000 refugees jammed into the compound seeking a safe haven. At Huaiqing, Japanese planes dropped bombs on Chinese soldiers and civilians alike; within one 24-hour period, 102 seriously wounded were operated upon by a staff of two doctors and two missionary nurses.

Soon afterward, Japanese forces took over the areas where North China missionaries were living at Anyang, Weihui, and Huaiqing. Once again missionaries were warned to evacuate, but this time most chose to stay. Their decision was praised in April 1938 by Chiang Kai-shek, who, according to North China mission historian Margaret Brown, claimed that "thousands of people had escaped pain, suffering and death as a result of the missionary effort, and girls and women have been saved from a fate

26 Louise MacKenzie McLean, interview with author, April 2003.

worse than death.”²⁷ The idea that defying consular orders could be valorous was becoming well ingrained.

By 1938 the nursing situation at the North China Mission had become dire. The volume of work was becoming overwhelming at the same time as three nurses resigned to be married. One of these was Georgina Menzies, who was engaged to Baptist Missionary Society physician Dr. John Lewis.²⁸ The North China Mission was having difficulty finding replacement nurses. Not only were parents loathe to allow their daughters to go to war-torn China, but Canadians were starting to question the value of the missionary enterprise. Professor of law and later president of the University of Toronto Sydney Smith asserted that “missions are the dream of the dreamer who dreams that he has been dreaming” — a view that pioneer missionary Dr. James Fraser Smith directly challenged in his 1937 memoir, *Life's Waking Part*.²⁹ Dr. Bob McClure made an urgent plea for more nurses, appealing to the Toronto General Hospital nursing school superintendent Jean Gunn, as well as to the United Church community in Toronto. A vivacious and passionate orator, Bob McClure pled his case at the kitchen table of the Thomson family's home: Henan needed nurses.³⁰ Having recently completed nurse's education in Toronto, Betty Thomson, Mary Boyd, and Dorothy Boyd considered his entreaty. With parents in China, an understanding of Chinese culture, and education in a practical profession, the three unmarried women were ideal missionary candidates. They made a pact to return to China together.

In 1939 Betty Thomson, Mary Boyd, and Dorothy Boyd were back in China taking language study at Beijing when word came that North China missionaries in Henan were experiencing increasingly hostile behaviour from the Japanese, who had occupied Henan province. Only a few months after returning to China, Betty, Mary, and Dorothy found themselves in the middle of an unanticipated reunion with two other mishkid nurses at the seaside resort of Beidaihe (Peitaiho) while awaiting further direction: Georgina and John Lewis were there on their honeymoon, while Florence Mackenzie Liddell was on summer vacation with her two children. The mish-kids were thrilled; Beidaihe was the charming place where they had spent their childhood summers. Betty Thomson's letters to her mother in Toronto give a hint of her excitement at the prospect of seeing Florence again: “Guess what! Eric & Flo's holidays will not

27 Brown, “History of the Honan (North China) Mission,” 97:7.

28 UCCA Bio File, Georgina Menzies.

29 Cited in John H. MacVicar's foreword to J. Fraser Smith, *Life's Waking Part: Being the Autobiography of Reverend James Fraser Smith, Pioneer Medical Missionary to Honan, China, and Missionary to Central Asia* (Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1937).

30 Ruth Thomson Laws, interview with author, June 2004.

be until August, so Flo and the kids are coming to Pei Tai Ho [Beidaihe] with us at Mae Lynns's!!! Whoops me lad!! Isn't it *wonderful!!!*?"³¹ The young women wasted no time reliving their giddy childhood years, playing endless rounds of tennis, having picnics, and traipsing off to shop — even carrying “steamer rugs over our heads” like teenagers when caught in the middle of a downpour.³² By the end of that enchanted summer, Betty and Mary had each fallen in love.

As it turned out, Betty, Mary, and Dorothy never did make it back to the North China Mission in Henan province. By the fall of 1939 the Japanese occupiers were threatening to force the missionaries out of Anyang, Weihui, and Huaqing. The missionaries, however, resisted evacuation. Those at the Anyang mission barricaded themselves within the walls of the mission compound for three weeks before the gates were set on fire and grenades were thrown over the wall. They evacuated on September 16, 1939.³³ Those at the Weihui compound remained there for four weeks before heeding a warning that they must leave by October 12 or “drastic action” would be taken by the Japanese.³⁴ After the Huaqing compound was occupied by 80 Japanese soldiers on October 6, 1939, missionaries lingered for almost three weeks before evacuating. By the end of October, all three main mission sites had closed. Only Betty's father remained in Henan province. Reverend Andrew Thomson refused to leave, remaining at his small mission site in Daokou (Taokow), camouflaged by dressing in Chinese clothing, until forced by the Japanese to evacuate on May 24, 1940.

Mish-kid Marriages

The North China Mission scrambled to find meaningful work for the newly hired mish-kid nurses. Within months, Betty Thomson was seconded to the Qilu University hospital in Jinan — the very place where her beau, London Missionary Society Dr. Godfrey Gale, was working. They became engaged at Christmas in 1939 and were married in September 1940. Mary Boyd had been seconded to Tianjin and later Sanqui (Kweiteh), but, when the latter was evacuated in October 1940, she decided to return to Beijing where she and her fiancé, mish-kid John Stanley, arranged a quick wedding. On November 17, 1940, Rev. George K. King sent a telegram to Mary's parents at the West China Mission in Sichuan to inform them of the upcoming wedding, set for November 30, 1940.³⁵ Given the wartime sanctions, such a tight timeline meant Mary's

31 Margaret Wightman private collection, letter from Betty Thomson (Beijing) to “Folks” (Toronto), May 14, 1939.

32 *Ibid.*

33 Grypma, *Healing Henan*, pp. 148–150.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

35 UCCA 83.058C, Box 56, File 13, Series 3, Mary Stanley to Mrs. Taylor, January 16, 1941.

parents could not attend. From the perspective of those living through those precarious days in occupied China, Mary's decision that this was "no time in the world's history to become widely separated and lead separate lives" made perfect sense.³⁶ Because John Stanley hoped to continue studying for a PhD, the couple made plans to stay in Beijing for two more years.³⁷ They were aware of the risks of staying, however. As Mary wrote to the WMS secretary in January 1941, if "the situation becomes so critical that we have to leave, I suppose we will. [However,] we must both have China blood right in us, I think, and are happy to live and work here in China, with the language and with the people as long as we can."³⁸

In early 1941 only one of the six mish-kid nurses — Dorothy Boyd — was still unmarried. Once again, the British consulate was calling for the evacuation of British (and thus Canadian) women and children from occupied regions, leaving all six mish-kid nurses with the same decision — to leave or to stay? For the five married nurses, evacuation would mean separating from their husbands. Those who did not already have young children were expecting them. Dorothy Boyd, the pregnant Florence Mackenzie Liddell, and Jean Menzies Stockley decided to evacuate. The three who remained — Betty Thomson Gale, Georgina Menzies Lewis, and Mary Boyd Stanley — were each pregnant that year. Each was placed under house arrest on December 8, 1941, in Jinan, Chu-wang, and Beijing respectively. Together with their husbands and children, Betty, Georgina, and Mary were interned at separate camps — Weixian, Ash, Yangzhou (Yangchow) Camp B, and Pudong — for the duration of the war. Jean's husband Handley Stockley somehow escaped; there is no record of his internment. Florence's husband Eric Liddell died of a brain tumour in Weixian Camp in February 1945. Although the rest survived, none returned to China after the war.

Becoming a North China Mish-kid

So, through a process of osmosis, we grew up feeling comfortable in both Western and Chinese ways. (North China mish-kid Marion Menzies Hummel)

The life trajectories of the six mish-kid nurses who worked at the North China Mission between 1923 and 1941 were remarkably similar. All decided to return to China in the midst of a local or national crisis. All resisted evacuation at some point. Five married non-Canadian China missionaries, relinquishing their official identity as nurses with the United

36 UCCA 83.048C, Box 56, File 13, Series 3, G. K. King to Mrs. Taylor, December 27, 1940.

37 UCCA 83.058C, Box 56, File 13, Series 3, Mary Stanley to Mrs. Taylor, January 16, 1941.

38 *Ibid.*

Church of Canada North China Mission. That Mrs. Betty Gale, Mrs. Georgina Lewis, and Mrs. Mary Stanley were no longer officially recognized as Canadian missionary nurses explains, in part, why the story of interned Canadian nurses has remained hidden. Nothing in official Japanese camp records suggests a connection between these three women; each had taken on the name and nationality of her husband. For the Japanese nominal rolls, Betty Gale identified herself as a “[British] missionary nurse,” Mary Stanley as “wife of CJ Stanley,” and Georgina Lewis as “wife of JL Lewis.”³⁹

To understand what about their North China childhoods shaped these six missionary nurses into independent-minded women who were willing to return to and stay in China at a time when few others would consider it, we now turn to an exploration of the nature of their upbringing. Three aspects of a mish-kid childhood left indelible — if not unintended — marks on the lives of Canadian mish-kid nurses: intimate and forbidden relationships with Chinese people and culture (becoming Chinese), a boarding school upbringing with painful separations from their parents (becoming Canadian), and exposure to large-scale human suffering (becoming missionaries).

Becoming Chinese: Developing Language and Relationships

To mish-kids born in Henan in the early twentieth century, rickshaws, chopsticks, and amahs (Chinese nursemaids) were as familiar as Brontë novels, piano lessons, and Christmas plays. While their parents immersed themselves in the evangelist and humanitarian service they had come to China to fulfil, North China mish-kids immersed themselves in “everything dusty and heavenly” — not realizing that riding donkeys on the beach at Beidaihe, absorbing the work songs of coolies, poling up the Wei River on barges, and purchasing Chinese delicacies from the street vendors outside the mission gates were unusual activities for Canadian children.⁴⁰ (See Figure 1.)

Living in enclaves created by and for foreigners, mish-kids grew up in a world that was at once sheltered and dangerous, structured and unpredictable. As British subjects, mish-kids enjoyed the privileges granted their parents and other missionaries, including the privilege to move freely around China, to purchase property, and to establish Christian-based institutions. In practical terms, this meant that mish-kids grew up within the boundaries (later walled and gated) of mission compounds, self-contained foreign enclaves that were eventually comprised of rows of Western-style homes with flourishing gardens and tennis courts, chapels, and hospitals. Formally separated from the Chinese — and, as will be seen, from their

39 Gregory Leck, *Captives of Empire: The Japanese Internment of Allied Civilians in China, 1941–1945* (Bangor, PA: Shandy Press, 2006).

40 Marnie Copland, *Mooncakes and Maple Sugar* (Burlington, ON: G. R. Welch Company Limited, 1980).



Figure 1: Mavis Knight with Kuo Yun, 1933 (private collection of Mavis Knight Weatherhead).

parents — mish-kids nonetheless found ways to skirt around the social barriers, listening in on private adult conversations on the one hand, and sneaking into forbidden Chinese conversations with Chinese staff and children on the other.

Mish-kids were curious bystanders to the world of missionary work, watching as their parents preached in tent meetings set up at Chinese festivals, hosted British-style tea parties in their homes, led singsongs, and agitated with other missionaries over the political situation in China. Mavis Knight Weatherhead, daughter of Weihui Hospital administrator Norman Knight, recalls listening in on animated discussions in her parents' living room:

We kids had a front row seat when the meetings were held in our living room. Our bedroom that was directly above, had a hole in the corner of the floor that was formerly used for a heating pipe. We used to lift the cover to peek through the opening and to hear what was going on. The end of the meeting was signalled by a sudden silence followed by the words, "Let us pray." Then we would eagerly wait through the first few minutes of mumbled prayers until we heard a familiar rumble that began to build in volume. It only lasted a few seconds until it ended with a sharp snort. Someone had dutifully poked our dear friend Miss McLennan in the ribs to wake her up.⁴¹

41 Mavis Knight Weatherhead, communication with author, May 11, 2008.

Similarly, Betty Thomson Gale recalled attending tent meetings with her parents when she was not in school:

I can remember often going with mother and Dad out into the country places for days at a time. Dad would conduct the meetings while Mother played the small, portable organ and led the singing. My sister Peggy and I would sit up on a flight of stairs and listen, sometimes staring back at people who had poked a hole in the paper windows to stare at us!⁴²

As young bilingual children, mish-kids gravitated to the hidden spaces that separated Chinese and Canadian life. They conversed fluently in Chinese on the back porch with their amahs and cooks — and in the yard with Chinese playmates — and then sat at formally set dining room tables eating Western-style meals prepared and served by Chinese servants. Language was the key to moving between these worlds. The language of these encounters was a very practical (if not vulgar) form of Chinese — which included some words that young Bob McClure's father, upon hearing, forbade him to speak.⁴³

While missionary parents took advantage of their children's fluency, for example, "translating Chinese into English and English into Chinese for my grandmothers and [my amah] Shen Dasao,"⁴⁴ they also worried about their children's inevitable transition to Canadian life when they were grown. Dr. William McClure "used to draw a chalk line across the door and he'd give me [Bob] a real good spanking if we spoke a word of Chinese inside that chalk line because he said 'you're speaking Chinese all day, you're playing with Chinese' and he said if you're going to learn English, you'll have to learn English before we go to Canada."⁴⁵

Their parents' suppression of Chinese language bothered mish-kids like Bob McClure. It seemed strange to him that their daily family Bible reading and prayer, in which the Chinese amah, cook, and gardener joined, was always in Chinese, and yet he was forbidden to speak Chinese within the walls of his home. Chinese was his first language, and there were some Chinese words for which there were no English equivalents.⁴⁶ As he described it at age 76, "Chinese is my natural language

42 Murray McCheyne Thomson, *A Daring Confidence: The Life and Times of Andrew Thomson in China, 1906–1942* (Ottawa, published by author, 1992), pp. 188–189.

43 Munroe Scott, *McClure: The China Years of Dr. Bob McClure* (Toronto: Canec Publishing, 1977).

44 Marion Menzies Hummel, *Memoirs of a Mish-Kid* (St. Catharines, ON: Elizabeth Mittler, 2000), p. 18.

45 Library and Archives Canada [hereafter LAC], MG 31, Series D78, Vol. 44, File 44–29, interview of Dr. Robert McClure by Peter Stursberg, Toronto, July 14, 1976.

46 Scott, *McClure: The China Years*.

and, today if I get angry, I get angry in Chinese. I don't get angry in English."⁴⁷

Betty Thomson's brother MacKay Thomson recalled speaking Chinese fluently until he went away to the missionary boarding school at Weihui. There students were also forbidden to speak in Chinese, which disturbed MacKay Thomson: "to this day I can't understand why not. We did play soccer with Chinese boys on occasion and we talked Chinese then, of course."⁴⁸ During summer vacations at Beidaihe, Marion Menzies Hummel "loved to sit in the back courtyard eating Chinese noodles with the servants. On the beach we chatted with the Chinese fishermen, admiring their catches of fish held in fish-wells in their boats. ... That sense of being at ease in two cultures stayed with me throughout my life."⁴⁹

Despite parental efforts to contain it, mish-kids found creative ways to learn and use Chinese, using the forbidden words with particular relish at opportune times. Mavis Knight, the only child of Norman and Violet Knight, used her knowledge of prohibited Chinese words to her advantage during the Japanese occupation. Walking along the tops of the compound walls, Mavis would call out "naughty words" in Chinese. She could tell by the reactions whether the soldiers below were Chinese or Japanese: the Japanese would not respond.⁵⁰

In addition to learning spoken Chinese, mish-kids cultivated a taste for Chinese food and an intrinsic understanding of certain aspects of Chinese philosophy and values, including the importance of saving face. As Marnie Lohead Copland commented:

An American mission board secretary once remarked to us that of all the missionaries he deals with [around the world], the old China hands are the most clannish and the most devoted to their adopted country. From whatever part of the Western world we come, and in whatever part of China we have lived, we are united in our love of that country and in our loyalty to each other. This secretary said that we have come to think like Chinese. Our real meanings lie not in our spoken words but in the implications behind the words.⁵¹

Although missionary parents placed restrictions on their children's development and use of language, they were not opposed to all cultural influences. Missionary parents who perceived China as their adopted

47 LAC, MG 31, Series D78, Vol. 44, File 44-29, interview of Dr. Robert McClure by Peter Stursberg, Toronto, July 14, 1976.

48 Thomson, *A Daring Confidence*, p. 191.

49 Hummel, *Memoirs of a Mish-Kid*, p. 15.

50 Mavis Knight Weatherhead, interview with author, November 2006.

51 Copland, *Mooncakes and Maple Sugar*, p. 51.

home desired that their children also view China as home. For example, in 1911, when Bob McClure was 11 years old, he accompanied his father back to China while his mother remained with her parents in Canada. Dr. William McClure did not want his son to be separated too long during these formative years from his natural environment. As Bob McClure's biographer has accurately noted, "it is highly significant that in the minds of both Dr William McClure and his son, Bob's 'natural environment' was unquestionably accepted as being North Henan, China."⁵²

Becoming Canadian: Boarding School at Weihui

For mish-kids with no first-hand experience with Canada, the notion of being Canadian was strange. Through encounters with Canada — either directly through furlough or indirectly through a Canadian curriculum — mish-kids began to conceive what the term "Canadian" actually meant and how it applied to them. Marnie Lohead Copland pinpointed the moment "I became Canadian" as the day she made maple syrup in the Ontario woods with her relatives at age seven. Marnie recalled, "I had known my parents only in China, and was surprised to find that they had had a life of their own in Canada before I was born."⁵³ With furloughs only every seven years, missionary parents believed that the best way to develop "Canadian" children was to educate them using Canadian standards and curricula. Formal education, in China as in Canada, was the means through which children would learn not who they were, necessarily, but who they should be. Thus began years of learning English grammar, Canadian geography, and British history.

One of the overriding values of missionary parents was the education of their children. Missionary children would eventually return to Canada, where they would be expected to meet the standards and requirements of Canadian secondary schools and universities. By 1908 Weihui had become the centre for missionary children's education. In that year, 10-year-old Jean Menzies left her parents' home at Huaqing, approximately 150 kilometres further inland, to live with the McClure family at Weihui. Rather than teach her themselves, Jean's parents thought she would receive a better education as a member of the little group that was growing around a woman named Maria Sloan.⁵⁴ Jean joined the McClure household and grew up with Bob McClure, two years her junior. In 1910, Mrs. Jeanette Ratcliffe — a widow and a nurse — was invited to become the matron of the Weihui residential school for missionary children. Mrs. Ratcliffe held the position until she was appointed the

⁵² Scott, *McClure: The China Years*, p. 23.

⁵³ Copland, *Mooncakes and Maple Sugar*, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Scott, *McClure: The China Years*, p. 10.

first nursing superintendent of the Weihui Hospital and Training School for Nurses in 1922. Thus the mish-kids who returned to China as nurses already knew Mrs. Ratcliffe well.

The North China Mission compound at Weihui had a hospital, boys' and girls' middle school, a Chinese church, and approximately 10 missionary houses, as well as the boarding school. Over the course of its service, the missionary children's school "never had more than twenty children — often less."⁵⁵ The school was housed in a two-storey grey brick building built with a boys' dormitory in one wing and a girls' dormitory in the other. There were a matron's and teacher's bedrooms in between on the second floor. Downstairs was a living room on one side of the central hall and two classrooms on the other side. It was not an extravagant place:

There was no electricity or flush toilets. We carried candles up to our bedrooms each night. A holding tank of rainwater set near the ceiling over two washrooms provided us with cold running water to fill our hand basins. A communal bath system, where each of us bathed after the other, was in a cubicle to one side of the bathroom. Chinese servants brought up buckets of hot water for our baths. . . . [O]ur meals were called by bell and we sat at one long table. Our diet was Western style, though at times we enjoyed Chinese food.⁵⁶

Missionary children whose parents lived relatively close by could visit home every few weeks. For those further afield, visits might occur only at Christmas, Easter, and summer vacations. Mish-kids described their visits home as highly anticipated events. Betty Thomson Gale recalled that, when she took the train from Weihui to Daokou, her father would be waiting for her and her siblings at the station on a bicycle:

We kids would ride in rickshas through the narrow streets of the city, always packed with people. Some of them would yell at us "Foreign Devils" or some such term, but good naturedly and without apparent malice. My older brother Mac was their favourite target: Bao bay, Bao bay (his Chinese name) and he would happily acknowledge their greeting w/ those of his own.⁵⁷

Betty remembered what a "thrill" it was to arrive at the compound gate and walk up the tree-lined pathway to their home, where her mother was "always waiting for us on the doorstep" with the youngest child, Muriel, "and what a welcome we received. We would dash into the

⁵⁵ Hummel, *Memoirs of a Mish-Kid*, p. 26.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Thomson, *A Daring Confidence*, p. 188.

house to see what new wonders she had created while we were away at school.”⁵⁸

Such nostalgic reminiscences provide important insight into how missionary children constructed the long separations from their parents. For China mish-kids, separation from their parents started at a young age: Betty Thomson’s brother MacKay Thomson, for example, left for Weihui in 1914 at the age of five. While some mish-kids embraced the boarding school experience at Weihui, others were consumed by isolation and loneliness. If the familiarity of such separations accounts for the later decision by Florence MacKenzie Liddell to return to Canada without her husband Eric, the painfulness of childhood separations may equally account for the decision by Betty Thomson Gale, Mary Boyd Stanley, and Georgina Menzies Lewis to stay in China with their husbands.

Marion Menzies Hummel experienced separation from her parents as a form of neglect. Born to Rev. James Mellon and Annie Menzies in 1913, Marion was a contemporary of Betty Thomson, Dorothy Boyd, and Mary Boyd. She recalled a father who was both distant and severe. James M. Menzies (no relation to the murdered James R. Menzies) became better known for his archaeological passions than evangelistic ones. Stationed at the North China Mission site at Anyang, James Menzies discovered oracle bones — tortoise shells and other bone fragments inscribed with predictions by royal diviners from the Shang Dynasty (1300 BCE). Menzies became increasingly preoccupied with what grew into a priceless collection.⁵⁹ From the perspective of his daughter Marion, James was

strict and often angry, for he had migraine headaches, but I remember only once that he hit me and that is when Frances and I quarrelled so loudly that he took the flyswatter to our legs. When we were young our father did not write to us on a regular basis, leaving this to mother, but when he did write they were letters to remember.⁶⁰

Because of the physical separation of missionary children from their parents, letter writing was an integral part of the missionary experience. Letters flowed regularly between missionary children and their parents regardless of whether they were separated by the Yellow River or the Pacific Ocean. As Marion Menzies Hummel described, “I feel that, looking over our years in boarding school, in many ways we children were brought up by our mothers’ letters. They were loving, instructive,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ See Linfu Dong, *Cross Culture and Faith: The Life and Work of James Mellon Menzies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

⁶⁰ Hummel, *Memoirs of a Mish-Kid*, p. 29.

urging us to do our best, to depend on God and to fortify ourselves with His promises in scripture, and to keep on striving.”⁶¹ The letters were also used to instil values and ethnic, religious, and national identity — not all of which the mish-kids accepted. When Marion was at boarding school at age 13 in 1926, her mother wrote:

Just thank God you aren't a poor little Chinese girl. Do you remember Dung-Lai the girl in my school with the brown hair, who often came to the door for something. Well, she was married last week. Just fancy that! And to a man about 40 and of course whom she had never seen. Her mother got \$150 for her. How would you like that, dear? She cried & cried & didn't want to go. I cried too . . . I know it is hard dearie to be separated from your mother so much but Maudie & Bertha had their mother taken from them when they were just 6 & 8 years old & you see had no mother to write to when they were unhappy. Count your blessings dear.⁶²

Letters like this one attempted to construct a racial — if not national — identity that emphasized the notion of difference, of superiority of Canadian over Chinese cultural norms, including a rationalization for missionary parental separation. Mish-kids generally resisted, and resented, such claims of superiority, however. In fact, some denied experiencing any kind of racial discrimination during their childhood in China, including discrimination aimed toward them. Bob McClure, for example, contended that his first encounter with what he called “racial prejudice” was when he attended Harbord Collegiate in 1915. Here he discovered that he was considered a “WASP” (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) and that WASPs did not associate with Jews or Catholics. To Bob, discrimination based on race or religion was a North American phenomenon: “I had never heard or [was] aware of any racial stuff until I got to Canada [at age 15].”⁶³

While Marion's mother's letter exemplifies a familiar theme in post-colonial studies — the imperialist or colonialist gaze — mish-kid children did not take up the Chinese-as-other in the same way as their parents had. Whether resistance to the discrimination sometimes displayed by their parents was a form of adolescent defiance or simply contrary to their sense of rootedness in the China that extended beyond the walls of the mission compound, mish-kids did not define themselves in terms of how they differed from the Chinese. In this way, the North Henan mish-kid phenomenon complicates Edward Said's Orientalist gaze and Franz

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 94–95.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

63 LAC, MG 31, Series D78, Vol. 44, File 44–29, interview of Dr. Robert McClure by Peter Stursberg, Toronto, July 14, 1976.

Fanon's colonized/colonizer sense of "us" and "them."⁶⁴ For these mish-kids, "we" were the China-born; "we" moved fluidly between otherwise segregated Chinese and Canadian groups; "we" were puzzled by the rules of separation laid down by missionary parents; and "we" resisted subaltern notions of superiority based on race, religion, or nationality.

If mish-kids felt isolated during the regular school year, summer vacation was an entirely different affair. It is difficult to overstate the significance of summer vacations at Beidaihe, a seaside resort in Qinhuangdao municipality in Hebei province: without exception, North China mish-kids considered Beidaihe the highlight of their childhood. Easily accessible by train from Tianjin, Beidaihe includes a beach of 10 kilometres, covered with fine yellow sand and stretching some 100 metres to the sea. Of all the experiences recollected by mish-kids, this was the one that most resembled a colonialized, segregated space — that is, a place of privilege not easily accessible by the regular Chinese populace.

Beidaihe was a gathering place for expatriates from across northern China, including missionaries, business people, and diplomats. Mothers would come with their children for the entire summer, with fathers joining for weeks at a time. The days were filled with tennis, beach activities, social gatherings, and picnics. A number of North China missionaries built summer homes at Beidaihe. Muriel Thomson Valentien recalled spending hours at the beach exploring and playing with her brother Murray. Supervised by "only a teenage brother or sister," Muriel and Murray would swim out to a raft "far beyond our depth" despite "meter-high breakers that came crashing in."⁶⁵ There were no lifeguards, only one "danger sign at one end of the beach: *Undertow, beware!*"⁶⁶

What is striking about both the long separations and the Beidaihe vacations is how remarkably unperturbed missionary parents were by the notion of leaving their children in the hands of caregivers — be they Chinese amahs, surrogate missionary families, boarding school teachers, or teenage siblings. As working men and women, missionary parents had a divine purpose into which the daily routines of parenthood did not easily fit. Perhaps more importantly, missionary parents held an essential belief that their children's fate was ultimately in the hands of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God. As Muriel Thomson Valentien understood it, "Our parents trusted — in life, and in something higher than themselves; a spiritual reality guiding and sustaining them — and

64 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grover Press, 1963; 2004).

65 Murray Thomson private collection, Murray Thomson, "Mother, God Bless Her! A Memoir Based on the Letters and Stories of Margaret Mackay Thomson, 1881–1973," p. 10.

66 *Ibid.*

us. And this trust with which we were imbued, carried into our later lives.”⁶⁷ Allowing one’s children to swim unsupervised, to travel alone by train, or to be cared for by relative strangers may have been risky, but no more so than other aspects of missionary life. To North China missionaries and their children, missionary work was a dangerous calling.

Becoming Missionaries: The Call to Live Dangerously

The call to the Christian adventure is always a call to live dangerously. Not foolishly dangerously, of course, but wisely so, if that phrase can pass as not mutually contradictory! (Rev. Andrew Thomson, 1936)⁶⁸

The tranquillity of the North China missionary childhood described by some mish-kids stands in sharp relief to the backdrop of violence and suffering characterizing this period in China’s history. While it is reasonable to presume that, as young children, mish-kids were both oblivious to and naïve about the wartime conditions around them, it would be erroneous to conclude that they had no exposure to the large-scale suffering that characterized China during this period. Born during the years when China was reinventing itself as a powerful and nationalist republic — Betty Thomson was born during the last year of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) — mish-kids were thus acculturated into a world of warlord rule and regular eruptions of civil violence. Despite parental attempts to shield them from the worst dangers and most disturbing sights, this was neither completely possible nor realistic, not least of all because their parents were closely engaged with the populace with whom they lived and worked.

Betty Thomson was reared in a socio-political milieu of constantly shifting political power. When the mish-kid nurses first returned to China in the 1920s, the balance of power was shifting back to the Chinese, particularly to Chinese students. During the 1930s, a period of relative security under Nationalist rule in China, the North China missionaries were relinquishing administrative control over some of their programmes in response to new Nationalist government requirements. Administration of the nursing programme at the Weihui Hospital and Training School for Nurses, for example, was passed from Jeanette Ratcliffe to her former pupil Li Shuying.

The relationship between Canadians and their Chinese protégés became increasingly tenuous as young Chinese sought solutions to the tensions between conflicting loyalties to state (China), science (nursing and

67 *Ibid.*

68 Thomson, *A Daring Confidence*, p. 136.

medicine), and religion (Christianity).⁶⁹ When the Japanese declared war on China in 1937, however, the balance of power shifted again, and Canadians found an unprecedented opportunity to show solidarity with the Chinese through resistance against a common enemy. Canadian missionaries determined to support China in the way they best knew how — as purveyors of Western medicine and nursing.

Reared in such a precarious period, mish-kids were not oblivious to the strain under which their parents worked. The Thomson children, for example, listened to their father passionately speaking of the need for peace to be brought to China and observed him being “reduced to tears” when confronted by intense injustice.⁷⁰ Ruth Thomson Laws retained an early memory of seeing a small, badly burned Chinese boy brought to her father for healing. Before being sent out of the room, Ruth observed what looked like a large feathered bird, with a small boy’s face and head: “The child had been burned from head to toe and his mother had covered the awful sight with mud and feathers. Infection and suppuration had followed and as a last resort she brought him to a foreigner. The stench from the festering sores was terrible.”⁷¹ There was no hospital at Daokou, so Rev. Andrew Thomson prepared a bath of warm water and proceeded to soak off the mud and feathers, little by little. Each day a bit more of the burn was exposed and treated with a healing salve. “I remember thinking, then,” recalled Ruth, “that Dad could be a doctor, too.”⁷²

If mish-kids were witness to their parents’ response to suffering, they also were witness to (and inadvertent participants in) violent events. Recalling a time when two rival warlords were vying each other for a section of the Beijing-Hankou railroad, Marnie Lohead Copland wrote:

Father [Arthur Lohead] decided that walking home would be preferable to spending the night at an inn. Before they had gone very far, bullets began to ping and raise spurts of dust around them. ... Father and [my sister] Ruth found themselves in the middle of a battle. An open grave happened to be conveniently near the road, so Father jumped in and pulled Ruth down after him. ... After an hour or so ... Father said, “Dear, if it should happen that a bullet hits you, and if it should happen that I’m not able to help you, just take off your hair ribbon and tie it tightly above the hole.”⁷³

69 For a fuller discussion, see Grypma, *Healing Henan*.

70 Thomson, *A Daring Confidence*, p. 182.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

72 *Ibid.*

73 Copland, *Mooncakes and Maple Sugar*, p. 43.

After this frightening admonition to his daughter, Arthur Lohead recommended that they eat their lunch. After a few moments Ruth deadpanned, "I can chew it, Daddy, but I can't swallow it."⁷⁴

Murray Thomson considered their family to be "only thinly protected from roving groups of bandits and warlords by an easily-scaled wall."⁷⁵ His sister Muriel described their childhood "out there" this way:

[W]e were surrounded by revolutions, conflicts between warlords, unrest also through periods of drought, floods, famine. We knew nothing of all this, although our adult world was fully involved in alleviating the suffering wherever possible. We had the perfect security of home, and — I speak now for myself — it was a basis helping me feel at home wherever my later life has taken me.⁷⁶

If their childhood coincided with China's most dangerous seasons, so did their return to China between 1923 and 1939. Yet the timing of the return of mish-kid nurses — and the fact that they were willing to return at all — had far-reaching consequences for the continuation of the mission and the development of modern nursing. In particular, the return of Jean Menzies in 1923 and the return of Betty Thomson, Dorothy Boyd, and Mary Boyd in 1939 occurred during critical periods when the threat of danger and violence was at its peak, and missionaries were seeking reassurance regarding the validity and viability of their mission. The attitude of mish-kids to work in China was straightforward: "There are risks, but missionaries have to take these risks. It is a part of the modern job."⁷⁷

Conclusion: "Look to your safety in the Chinese lines"

"Accounts almost ready": Situation critical, consul advises prepare to evacuate

"Paint available": Consul advises evacuate at once by rail

"Enamel available": Look to your safety in the Chinese lines: danger of internment (key to ciphered codes from Andrew Thomson's diary, 1939)⁷⁸

In 1888 China Inland Mission pioneer Hudson Taylor urged missionaries to come to China because millions were dying without God.⁷⁹ Fifty years later, mish-kid Dr. Bob McClure urged Canadian nurses to come to

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Thomson, "Mother, God Bless Her," p. 13.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁷ Brown, "History of the Honan (North China) Mission," 112:1. Brown attributes these words to Dr. Bob McClure.

⁷⁸ Thomson, *A Daring Confidence*, p. 150.

⁷⁹ Austin, *Saving China*, p. 6.

China because thousands were dying without nursing care. Mish-kids who responded to the call for nurses did so in the spirit of humanitarian service that characterized their parents' brand of missions, but not with the same evangelical zeal. To the mish-kid nurses, nursing was a practical service — and their ticket to return to the land of their birth.

While it may be argued that the mish-kids' collective desire to return to China was firmly based in nostalgia — a wish to return to the privileged lifestyle of their childhood — one should not underestimate the religious motivation that underpinned their decisions to return and to stay in China. To be accepted into service by a mission board, these nurses had to articulate clearly their personal response to the teachings of Christ and the relationship between their personal faith and the imperatives of missionary service. They were expected to understand and accept the basic doctrines taught by the United Church and later the tenets of their husbands' mission boards. Most importantly, the profound struggles of the wartime years catalysed ongoing re-evaluation of the faith learned in their childhood, personalizing and deepening their experience and understanding of God and Jesus Christ, of missionary life as a transformative spiritual journey, and of nursing as a Christian ministry to the poor and suffering. Their childhood had laid a foundation for this, too.

Canadian mish-kid nurses who were living in China in 1941 had been immersed in the rhetoric and reality of wartime living in Japanese-occupied China since the eruption of full-scale war with Japan in the summer of 1937. Furthermore, their entire lives were rooted in China as both their birthplace and their parents' adopted homeland. They had been reared in a socio-political milieu characterized by economic instability, eruptions of violence, foreigner evacuation, and natural disasters — each of which produced waves of human displacement, disease, and death. These mish-kid nurses were not naïve to the Japanese threat. Nor were they unfamiliar with the historical missionary response to threats: deciding if or when to evacuate was part of the missionary experience.

Mish-kid nurses created and embodied a unique identity that complicates presumed dualisms of Chinese/Canadian, married/nurse, modern/religious, and privileged/poor. Their identity as China-born mish-kids — more so than their identity as Canadian nurses — informed their individual decisions to return to and stay in wartime China during the years and months leading up to Pearl Harbor in 1941. While three of these nurses evacuated China in 1941, their decision to do so after four years of Japanese threat was consistent with a mantra well rehearsed in the North China Mission's tumultuous 50-year history in Henan: evacuation should be the missionary's last resort.

Why did three stay and three evacuate? Both groups had similar religious, professional, and domestic convictions and responsibilities — and a similar opportunity to leave. Arguments for the primacy of domestic and missionary duties can be made for both groups: both sought to

protect their families and missionary obligations. Nurses in both groups kept their children with them, and nurses in both groups had at least one family member who remained in China to carry on the mission work. These nurses understood the gendered roles and domestic duties of “good” wives and mothers, but they also understood the extra obligations that came with living with missionary husbands. Thus no overarching reason can be adduced, as each decision was highly personal.

The six mish-kid nurses who were living in China in 1941 were part of a new generation of missionaries that had been originated by Dr. Bob McClure and Jean Menzies in 1923. This second generation had a different idea of missionary work than their parents. They were trying to “demonstrate that through the love of God and the power of faith, the nature of man and the quality of life could be changed.”⁸⁰ While their parents came to China with evangelism as their primary agenda, this generation inclined toward the Christian social gospel — where personal faith was expressed through service. Finally, although “sheltered by British power,” mish-kids were “critical of exploitative colonialism” and were sympathetic to Chinese nationalism.⁸¹

In a word, mish-kid nurses were unconventional. They were different from their missionary parents, missionary peers, Canadian classmates, and Chinese colleagues. Yet they embodied an assured sense of self and a strong moral compass. Although the mish-kid nurses seemed to relinquish easily their formal identity as Canadian citizens and professional nurses when they married non-Canadian missionaries, the values that undergirded these identities were what led them to China and kept them there past the time when the Canadian government considered it safe to stay. For the mish-kid nurses, values like communalism, social responsibility, and tolerance for difference were deeply congruent with their religious identity as Christian missionaries — the only identity they never relinquished.

80 Scott, *McClure: The China Years*, p. 101.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 108.